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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL ASEC MO IS PA
SUBJECT: MOROCCANS SIMMERING OVER GAZA SITUATION

¶1. (SBU) The Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued on March 1 a strong and relatively unusual condemnation of the Israeli government for the IDF's military operations in Gaza.

The official Maghreb Arab Press (MAP) agency reported that the MFA "strongly denounced the 'horrible acts committed by the Israeli forces in Gaza against the civil population, mainly women and children.'" The MFA also condemned the "unfair blockade imposed on the Palestinian population ... in breach of international conventions and human values." MAP also reported that the MFA called upon all parties to "refrain from any reprisals that affect civilians, shatter hopes for peace, and breed violence."

¶2. (SBU) Images of the latest Gaza violence, particularly as carried by Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab media, appear to have inflamed Moroccan public opinion. Most coverage in the Moroccan press has been characterized by a tone of outrage. Patrons in a Rabat barbershop observed by PolOff on March 2 were visibly agitated by images shown on Al-Jazeera as they waited for haircuts. In the bazaar, sales of kafiyehs, the Palestinian headdress, have reportedly boomed.

¶3. (SBU) Also on March 2, Abdelilah Benkirane, a leader of the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD), and Khaled Sofiyani, chair of Morocco's Palestine Solidarity Committee, led a demonstration in Rabat of about 100 persons.

In remarks to the press, Sofiyani condemned what he called a "Zionist holocaust." Benkirane slammed Arab governments for their inactivity in response to Israeli "aggression" and promised that this would be the first of a series of protests. On February 29, Al-Adl Wal-Ihsane, (Justice and Spirituality) the large, unrecognized Islamist organization, organized a demonstration attended by hundreds Casablanca to condemn Israeli actions. More demonstrations are in the works, some potentially targeted at Consulate General Casablanca or the Embassy, but we would expect the authorities will keep them well away.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

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